

EDUCATION

APS board terminates former East high principal, council candidate accused of hitting teen

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Key Points

The Akron school board fired former East high school principal Vyrone Finney nearly four years after he was accused of hitting a student in the face.

Finney, who was acquitted in a criminal trial, plans to appeal and to sue current and former Akron school officials.

Finney is a Republican candidate for an at-large Akron City Council race in November.

The Akron Public Schools board on Monday voted 6-0 to fire former East high school principal Vyrone Finney, now a candidate for Akron City Council, nearly four years after he was accused of hitting a student in the face.

Finney was acquitted on a criminal charge related to the same incident, but the administrative case against him looked at whether he violated school district policies.

He is running as a Republican for an at-large seat on City Council in November.

Finney was not present for the vote, which happened about 9:45 p.m. Monday at the end of the board's regular meeting.

In a written statement provided to the Beacon Journal on Tuesday, Finney defended his actions.

"...My actions were taken in self-defense and in strict compliance with the crisis prevention training mandated by the Akron Public Schools to protect staff members from constant student assaults," he said.

Matt Markling, Finney's attorney, said Tuesday that Finney will appeal the board's decision to Summit County Common Pleas Court and plans to file a federal lawsuit against current

and former Akron school board members and administrators alleging process and whistleblower violations and discrimination. He said both will be filed in the next 30 days.

"It's far from over," Markling said.

Finney was placed on leave following the September 2019 incident, and the board voted in November of that year to begin the termination process against him. Finney requested a hearing, which was first delayed until the criminal issue resolved in 2021 but encountered more delays over the last two years.

Board begins termination process in 2019

According to the police report filed following the incident, Finney slapped a student after the teen called him an expletive in an altercation witnessed by school resource officers.

Finney reportedly told security, who witnessed the incident, that he "didn't feel like being called an [expletive] today."

The resolution the board passed in 2019 to begin the termination process detailed results of the internal investigation, noting Finney "struck a student in the face resulting in an injury to the student's lip," and "then continued to engage with the student pushing the student back against the wall."

"His actions caused the student to escalate," the document said.

The two school resource officers had to separate Finney from the 15-year-old student.

Finney's behavior was 'just cause' for termination, board finds

The resolution passed Monday night to finish the termination process said:

Finney "was provoked, momentarily lost control of himself and struck the student out of anger."

He violated several of the board's policies and guidelines and the Licensure Code of Professional Conduct for Ohio Educators that requires educators to "behave as professionals."

This behavior "constitutes good and just cause for termination."

Finney had significant community support following the incident, but he also had previous incidents in his personnel file.

Finney had three previous complaints filed against him, one for alleged neglect and two for alleged abuse, that children services investigated and determined to be "unsubstantiated." In at least one of the cases, however, Finney admitted to throwing a middle school student to the ground, telling the district the student had come at him first.

In that 2008 case, he was put on leave during the investigation and required to take anger management classes, according to his personnel file.

Finney was acquitted in Akron Municipal Court in 2021 on a misdemeanor assault charge for the 2019 East high school incident. He has been on unpaid leave since the board voted to begin the termination process in November 2019.

Finney is working as a minister and campaigning

Finney is currently working as a minister while campaigning for council.

"This whole process has reaffirmed his desire to run for council to ensure that due process and justice are applied to everyone evenly," Markling said.

Along with appealing the board's decision and filing a federal lawsuit, Finney has an issue pending with the 9th District Court of Appeals regarding records the district refused to provide him.

Markling said an expert who testified in board proceedings related to Finney's termination found that he "did everything he was trained to do properly."

"It's pretty outrageous — this whole process," Markling said.

Finney said in his written statement that student assaults on staff are a "daily threat" in the Akron schools.

He also said he has been a whistleblower about issues related to violence in the schools.

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Finney said he will continue to fight the district through all possible means.

"As an African American graduate, teacher and administrator of the Akron Public Schools, I am not surprised by the discriminatory and retaliatory practices of the Akron Public Schools," he said. "I am simply the most recent prey of an educational institution that continues to fail our students, parents and community."